

## Stranger Side of the Force by Redrikki

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**Summary:**

When the Party watches *Star Wars*, Eleven notices that she and Vader have a lot in common.

## Stranger Side of the Force

### Author's Note:

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The credits rolled and triumphal music played. So that was *Star Wars*. In the last six hours, the Rebels had destroyed two Death Stars and the Party had made a mess of the Byers' living room. An empty pizza box lay sprawled across the coffee table surrounded by greasy napkins and empty soda cans. There were candy wrappers and popcorn everywhere. Lucas and Max hauled themselves off the floor while Dustin set his empty popcorn bowl down next to his chair. Mike and Will got up from the couch to stretch, but Jane remained where she was.

It had been fun, listening to the others recite the lines and watching Dustin and Lucas duel while *The Empire Strikes Back* rewound. Jane had liked the story too. She'd yelled with Luke when Ben died, held her breath through the trench run, gasped at Vader's reveal, cheered when he saved Luke, and cried when he died. It was more than that though. Watching *Star Wars* had been like learning a new word, no, a new language. All that stuff the boys had talked about: Yoda, the Force, Lando. Jane got them now.

There was just one thing that didn't sit right with her. It kept her frowning on the couch while the others stretched and yawned. Mike had said once that she was like Yoda. She was and she wasn't. They both had the Force, but they used it differently. Yoda lifted ships out of the swamp. He didn't throw people into walls or melt their brains or choke them. Vader did that.

Mike caught sight of her face and froze mid-stretch. "El?" He sat back down beside her and took her hand. "What's wrong? Didn't you like the movie?"

"I'm Darth Vader!" The words hurt. Her eyes began to burn.

Dustin laughed. "I know, right? How freaking awesome is that?!"

Lucas rubbed his temple like the very idea pained him. “How is that awesome?” he demanded. “I don’t know if you noticed, but Vader’s the bad guy!”

Jane’s breath hitched. The bad guy. Vader was the bad buy. He was big and scary and hurt people she liked. Of course he was bad. But, if Jane was like him, if she used her powers like he did, then what did that make her? “I’m the bad guy,” she cried and burst into tears.

Mike’s eyes widened in alarm. “No. Hey.” He wrapped his arm around her. “You’re not the bad guy. You help people. Right, guys?” he appealed to the others.

“You found me in the Upside Down,” Will offered with a shy smile.

“You saved Hawkins,” said Lucas.

“Probably the world,” added Dustin.

Max nodded. “You’re basically a hero.”

“See?” Mike smiled triumphantly like he’d proved something.

He hadn’t. Jane buried her face in his chest. None of them understood. No one would have needed saving if it wasn’t for her. Jane opened the gate. Jane let the monsters through. Closing the gate had been like sweeping up the glass when she broke the cabin’s windows. It wasn’t heroic; it was cleaning up her mess.

“I hurt people, “ Jane confessed to Mike’s shirt.

“Yeah, bad people who were trying to kill us,” said Lucas. “I’m pretty sure that’s allowed.”

Jane pulled herself away from Mike’s embrace, wiping her nose with her sleeve. She’d hurt them too, or didn’t they remember? She’d yanked Max off her skateboard and thrown Mike and Lucas. Jane got mad or scared and bad things happened. Half the time she didn’t even mean it.

“I use anger. Fear.” Jane struggled to explain. Kali said they made her stronger and they did. That was the problem. Master Yoda would not

approve. Jane drew a shaky breath and forced herself to meet Mike's eyes. "I use the Dark Side."

None of them tried to talk that away. Dustin stared at her in horror. Lucas took a step back and even Mike pulled away. Only Max held her ground.

Will huddled down onto the couch. "Once you turn down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny," he said quietly, damning her with a quote. He curled in on himself, pale, his eyes wide and haunted. "Consume you, it will."

Jane sobbed. She didn't want to be consumed. She didn't want to be bad like Vader or Papa.

Max shook her head. "Guys," she said, "you're all forgetting one really important thing."

The Dark Side was bad. Hurting people was bad. Jane and the boys exchanged confused looks. What could they possibly be missing?

"That the Force isn't real?" Will suggested hopefully.

"It might be," said Dustin.

"You can not be serious!" Lucas rounded on Dustin. "Star Wars is fiction." He over-enunciated the word like he was talking to an idiot. "It's not real."

"Yeah?" Dustin yelled back, getting up in Lucas's face. "Well, D & D's not real either, but the Mind Flayer is. Why couldn't the Force be real too? Do you know how her powers work?" He gestured wildly in Jane's direction. "I don't."

"Hey!" Max forced her way in between the two boys before things got worse. "It doesn't matter if the Force is real. All that stuff Yoda said is bullshit!"

Jane was too shocked to cry. Her tears stopped with a gasp. The boys stared at Max with opened-mouth shock.

"What? No!" Mike protested, wrinkling his nose in confusion. "Yoda

is, like, totally wise and stuff.”

“Maybe,” Max shrugged, “but he and Ben lied to Luke about all sorts of important stuff to get him to kill Vader. Luke only wins because he ignores all their stupid advice.”

“That’s—” Mike trailed off. Jane could almost see the thoughts rearranging behind his eyes.

“Huh.” Dustin absently sank back into his chair. “Huh.”

“But, what does it mean?” Jane didn’t know what to think. Yoda was a liar who wanted to use Luke the way that Papa used her. Did that mean he was the bad guy now? Then was Vader good? Was she?

“It means what you *feel* doesn’t matter,” Max said. “What you *choose to do* does.”

“If I chose to be good,” Jane said slowly, testing the idea out, “then I’ll be good?” She wouldn’t lose her temper any more? It sounded almost too good to be true.

Max shook her head. “You have to work for it.”

Mike squeezed Jane’s hand. “I know you can do it,” he said with his heart in his eyes.

Jane sniffled, trying to hold back a fresh round of tears. She looked to her friends in turn. Max. Lucas. Dustin. Will. Mike. Each of them gave her an encouraging nod. She had hurt them, scared them, been mean, but they all still saw good in her. Jane let her tears flow. The Party was the the Luke to her Vader. They would lead her to the Light.